

Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet

“ A Society dedicated to the education and preservation of the Psalmodikon and Sifferskrift Music. ”



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Notes from MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

Beatrice Hole

Here in Minnesota we've been given an extra month of summer weather. With plenty of rain and no frost, the flowers are still in bloom. As the beautiful colored leaves are slowly falling, I realize it is time to put together the Autumn Newsletter.

You may have noticed that the shipping cost of the Psalmodikon Songbook had to be raised due to increase in postage. Thanks to all for your support, the Newsletter budget still allows us to mail the Newsletter without a raise in membership dues.

I say "thank you" to all those who have been in contact with me this summer. It pleases me that there are still many folks who find the psalmodikon a fascinating instrument.

Thank you to Peter Ellertsen for contributing a report of his visit to Sweden when he attended the meeting of the psalmodikon players there in August.

I so enjoy keeping in touch with all you psalmodikon enthusiasts. And with this letter, I will wish you all an enjoyable holiday season surrounded by lots of beautiful music!

May you always have a song in your heart and music at your fingertips!

I CANNOT IMAGINE LIFE WITHOUT...MUSIC

Beatrice Hole

Think about this for a minute — How often throughout the day do you hear music? Quite a bit I would imagine. From listening to a radio, the television, a telephone, or an iPod. Even the birds sing. Music is something that is a large part of our everyday lives. The wonderful thing about music is that you don't need to have an instrument to make it. You have your voice, your hands or your feet. This can be music in itself.



Hopefully with more rehab and therapy Travis will be able to speak once again too. That was so touching. 



Above: (L-R) Kathy Pedersen, New Richmond, WI; Anne Farning, Onalaska, WI; Sandy Aune, East Moline, IL. They played and demonstrated at "Talent Night" held at a Norwegian Conference (Tre Lag Stevne) in South St. Paul in August. Left: Anne showing the psalmodikon played by her great-grandfather when he was a klokker at his church in Norway.

I could not imagine life without music because it is something that surrounds us every single day. It is something that you can always tune into and it will fit your mood. When you are feeling sad, you can turn on a happy song and just let go. You can start singing along, dancing, or just sit back and relax. I am sure your mood will get better.

Music is something that won't ever leave you and will be there for the rest of our lives. Medical science tells us there is an area in our brain that is never damaged by inflection. We can be thankful for that.

As I write this I see a miracle on the TV. Country singer Randy Travis (57), a Grammy-winning baritone singer found his voice again three years after a life-threatening stroke. At the ceremony in Nashville, he was able to get up out of his wheelchair and sang "Amazing Grace" during his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

On a sunny day in October, a few psalmodikon players gathered at the home of Beatrice Hole. We had a great time of visiting and playing all of our favorite songs. It was especially fun to play with Ruth Gibson and Betty Foslien after a long absence of attending our group sessions.



Above: (L-R) Kathy Pedersen, Floyd Foslien, Betty Foslien, Ruth Gibson, and Beatrice Hole.

VARIOUS INSTRUMENTS SIMILAR TO THE PSALMODIKON

— A Simple Montage



Left: Photo of an Estonian *mollpill* (or *moldpill*) player, taken several years ago at a Scandinavian Folk Festival in Washington, D.C. The *mollpill* instrument is modified after the Norwegian/Swedish Psalmodikon. Estonia, one of the Baltic countries, has many historic and cultural ties to Scandinavia. The *mollpill* was used primarily at religious services.



Right: The traditional music of Iceland is almost exclusively vocal. Often times they accompany themselves on a simple instrument called the *fiðla*. This instrument has two strings and it is played with the hand underneath the string in order to play the desired note.



Above (L): The *erhu* is a Chinese bowed string instrument sometimes referred to as a Chinese violin. It is played with a violin bow and fingers placed on the fret board much like the psalmodikon. It is very similar to an instrument originating in Egypt.



Above (R): This is the cutest little psalmodikon I have. A friend brought it back from the country of Jordan. It has one string and is played with a bow. The wood is decorated with hand carved figures and the box is covered with animal skin. —BH

Ed. Note: See [rebat](#).



Left: This two-string instrument is a Latvian *ģitā*. The *ģitā* dates back to 1829 and is a descendent of the psalmodikon that was used for liturgical singing. As it was filtered down through the Latvian peasantry they added a second string for harmony. The bridge is located in the middle and it had two sheep-gut strings and played with a violin bow.



Right: These instruments are the various styles of the *kantele*, a Finnish folk harp, an instrument that is to Finland as the psalmodikon is to Norway and Sweden. I recently attended a concert by Diane Jarvi, singer, guitarist, and *kantele* player along with accordionist Dan Newton, both of the Minneapolis area. I enjoyed hearing how Diane dives deeply into her Finnish heritage with a beautiful, sometimes haunting result. It was interesting to see how Diane worked the simple little *kantele* into her program for the evening. The sound was entrancing as was Diane's lovely and character-filled voice on songs about Finland, etc. —BH



'PRETTY NERDY' PSALMODIKONS MEET IN SWEDEN

Peter Ellertsen

First, the official business —

- In its 2016 annual meeting August 27 in Östervåla, Sweden, the Nordiska Psalmodikonförbundet (NPsF) asked me to convey its greetings and best wishes to the Nordic-American Psalmodikonförbundet and members.
- After the meeting, we laid bouquets at the graves of Johannes Dillner and Lars Paul Esbjörn, co-editors of an important early book on the psalmodikon. Esbjörn later immigrated to Illinois, where he founded the Swedish-American Augustana Lutheran Synod before returning to Östervåla in 1863.

Fifteen musicians from all parts of Sweden attended the meeting in Östervåla, a lovely town of 1,500 some 50 kilometers north of Uppsala — the only community I've ever seen with a statue of a chair instead of a local dignitary in its city park.

Cultural Pilgrimage

"To gather in Östervåla is a bit like coming to holy ground for us," Göran Carlström, president of the [Nordiska Psalmodikonförbundet](#), told a reporter for the UNT ([Upsala Nya Tidning](#)) media group.

"I call myself 'pretty nerdy' when it comes to the fascination for this instrument," Carlström added. "What motivates us in the Förbundet is primarily to preserve our cultural heritage."

(If you've ever wondered how to say "pretty nerdy" in Swedish, by the way, it's "ganska nördig".)

In the 1830s, Dillner was the senior pastor in Östervåla, and Esbjörn was his assistant. Later he spent 15 years in America and succeeded Dillner as pastor at Östervåla for several years before his death in 1870. According to local clergyman Kiell Tofters, Östervåla was a center for furniture production. Hence the statue of the chair in the town park. So



Members of [Nordiska Psalmodikonförbundet](#) pay their respects at the grave of the Rev. Lars Paul Esbjörn, founder of the old Swedish-American Augustana Lutheran Synod.

there were plenty of skilled craftspeople there who could turn out psalmodikons, and it is estimated as many as 10,000 were made in the area.

Tofters, who is writing a biography of Esbjörn, also took us through a psalmodikon museum behind the churchyard. It displays several dozen psalmodikons and related zithers in wooden cabinets. From Östervåla, Dillner's psalmodikon spread out across Sweden and into the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland and Estonia. In the early days of Swedish immigration to America, it was an icon of old-country heritage here as well.

So the NPsF's meeting at Östervåla was a bit of a pilgrimage. It was like a pilgrimage for the visitors from America, too, since I'm doing historical research on Esbjörn, and Debi's ancestors were members of his Augustana Synod parish church in Illinois.

It was also a lot of fun!

Food and Music

The meeting lasted from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. We stayed at a church retreat next to a pre-Reformation chapel dedicated to St. Birgitta outside of town, went into Östervåla for pizza and stocked up on bread, cheese, cold cuts and a tube of Kalles' caviar (a more recent Swedish icon) for breakfast. Sat-

urday night we feasted on Thai carry-out, followed by singing and an impromptu jam session with two Swedish keyed fiddles called *nyckelharpor*, a couple of ukuleles, a chromatic harmonica and a psalmodikon playing arpeggiated back-up chords. It was an eye-opener for a visitor from America that the Swedes knew all the words to all the songs, and harmony parts as well.

Church Service

Sunday we performed for the service at Östervåla church. The NPsF folks played several Swedish hymns, and Debi and I were invited to join them singing a verse each of "Amazing Grace" and "Children of the Heavenly Father" in English. NPsF members led the congregation in singing both hymns in Swedish, as well as *Din klara sol*, *Morgon mellan fjällen*, *Hör hur tempelsången*, *Vem kan segla and Bliv kvar hos mig* ("Abide With Me"). Also played were instrumentals *Dona nobis pacem* and a Nocturne by contemporary Swedish composer Evert Taube.

Ganska nördig?

— Count me in.

Next year's annual meeting will be in Hälsingland, in east-central Sweden, north of Stockholm, and the 2018 meeting will be in southern Småland. 🎵

Lars Roverud

Norwegian text (l) from [Norsk Biografisk Leksikon](#)

— Translated (r) by Kristen Åkre

NB: Links in the left column are for Norwegian-language references, links on the right for English (electronic version of this article).

Musiker og musikkpedagog [f. 19.12.1776]. Foreldre: Fullmektig, senere gårdbruker Peder Colbjørnsen Roverud (1751–1803) og Marie Elisabeth Larsdatter Søegaard. Gift 3.12.1807 i Christiania med Anne Marie Eger (1786 (døpt 2.2.)–13.11.1867), datter av kjøpmann Ole Olsen Eger (1749–99) og Anne Marie Trulsdatter (1755–1806).

Lars Roverud var med på å legge grunnlaget for et rikere sang- og musikkliv i Norge i tiårene etter 1814. Han gav flere av landets kommende profesjonelle musikere den første avgjørende musikkundervisning i sang, klaver og på strykeinstrumenter, blant dem komponisten Halfdan Kjerulf og fiolinisten Gudbrand Bøhn.

Roverud var elev ved katedralskolen i Christiania, ble dimittert til examen artium 1794 og studerte deretter en tid musikk i København. Conradine Dunker hevdet i sine erindringer at faren gjorde ham arveløs fordi han ikke ville studere teologi. Det kan være en forklaring på hvorfor Roverud valgte musikk som levevei på et tidspunkt da dette langt fra var vanlig i hans kretser. 1801 står han oppført i mantallet som fullmektig hos Peder Anker, og 1806 omtales han som “Litteratus og Musiklærer”.

Roverud grunnla Norges første musikkhandel 1809 og det første notetrykkeri 1811. Han var aktiv i Det dramatiske Selskab og en av grunnleggerne av [Det musikalske Lyceum](#) 1810. 1815 utgav han skriftet *Et Blik paa Musikens Tilstand i Norge*. Skriftet skildret musikkens skrøpelige tilstand i den hensikt å få de offentlige myndigheter til å opprette et musikkinstitut i Christiania.

Med midler fra [Det kongelige Selskab for Norges Vel](#) studerte Roverud 1819 sangmetoder under et studieopphold i Leipzig og Berlin. Dette fikk betydning for hans virke som sanglærer ved Christiania katedralskole, ved [Vaisenhuset](#) og som kantor i Vår Frelsers kirke.

Roverud gjorde flere forsøk på å få Stortinget til å bevilge penger til musikkutdannelse. 1834 ble det opprettet en “Lærestalt for Kirkesangere og Almueskolelærere” i Asker, også kjent som [Asker Seminarium](#). Her underviste Roverud i psalmodikonspill. Han var også lærer i kirkemusikk ved det praktisk-teologiske seminar ved universitetet.

Da Ole Andreas Lindemans koralbok ble autorisert til bruk i kirkene 1835, fikk Roverud offentlig støtte til å reise rundt i landet og utbre de nye melodiformene i landets skoler og kirker. Som pedagogisk hjelpemiddel benyttet han psalmodikon, et enstrengt instrument som kunne spilles etter et siffersystem. Instrumentet var lansert av [J. W. Bruun](#) i København 1823, men ble etter hvert tatt i bruk i alle de nordiske land. Roverud forbedret den danske modellen og utviklet en egen siffernoteskrift. Instrumentet var så enkelt i konstruksjonen at det kunne lages av enhver snekkerkyndig. Psalmodikonet, som fantes i flere stemmeleier (sopran, alt, tenor, bass), ble i løpet av 1830-årene det viktigste sangpedagogiske hjelpemiddelet i skole, kirke og hjem. Roverud sørget selv for å utgi samlinger med sanger og salmer som kunne spilles på instrumentet i en siffernotasjon som gjorde notekunnskap overflødig. 1835–37 og 1841–47 fikk han bevilgninger til kursvirksomhet for skoleungdom, skolelærere, kirkesangere og organister. Undervisningsreisene strakte seg fra Kristiansand i sør til Tromsø i nord.

Roverud var ingen komponist, men laget arrangementer og tilpasset andres musikk. Det gjaldt for eksempel Henrik Wergelands kantate i anledning Gutenberg-jubileet 1840.

Lars Roverud døde [26 feb.] 1850 etter å ha blitt påkjørt av en vogn.

Musician and teacher, born 19 Dec. 1776 to agent, and later farmer, Peder Colbjørnsen Roverud (1751–1803) and Marie Elisabeth Larsdatter Søegaard. Married 3 Dec. 1807 in Christiania to Anne Marie Eger (1786 (bapt. 2 Feb.)–13 Nov. 1867), daughter of merchant Ole Olsen Eger (1749–99) and Anne Marie Trulsdatter (1755–1806).

Lars Roverud helped to lay the groundwork for a richer song and music in Norway in the decades after 1814. He gave several of the country's upcoming professional musicians the first critical music lessons in singing, piano, and string instruments, among them composer [Halfdan Kjerulf](#) and violinist [Gudbrand Bøhn](#).

Roverud was a pupil at the cathedral school in Christiania, graduated in 1794, and then studied music for a time in Copenhagen. [Conradine Dunker](#) claimed in her memoirs that his father disinherited him because he would not study theology. That may be an explanation for why Roverud chose music as a career at a time when this was far from common in his circles. In 1801 he is listed in the census as an agent of Peder Anker, and in 1806 he is referred to as “Learned and Music Teacher”.

Roverud founded Norway's first music trade in 1809 and the first note printer 1811. He was active in the [Dramatic Society](#) and a founding member of the Musical Lyceum in 1810. In 1815 he published the pamphlet, *A Look at the State of Music in Norway*. The pamphlet portrayed music's frail condition in order to get the public authorities to create a music institute in Christiania.

With funding from the Royal Norwegian Society for Development, Roverud studied in 1819 song methods in Leipzig and Berlin. This had an impact on his work as singing teacher at the [Christiania Cathedral School](#), at Vaisenhuset, and as organist of Our Saviour Church.

Roverud made several attempts to get the Storting to allocate money for music education. In 1834 it created a “Learning Institute for Church Singers and Folk School Teachers” in Asker, known as [Asker Seminarium](#). Here Roverud taught playing psalmodikon. He also taught church music at the practical-theological seminary at the university.

When [Ole Andreas Lindeman](#)'s chorale book was authorized for use in churches in 1835, Roverud got public support to travel around the country and propagate the new melody forms in the country's schools and churches. As an educational aid, he used the psalmodikon, a stringed instrument that could be played by a cipher system. The instrument was introduced by J. W. Bruun in Copenhagen in 1823 but later adopted in all the Nordic countries. Roverud improved the Danish model and developed its own notation. The instrument was so simple in structure, it could be made of any carpenter. The psalmodikon, which came in several pitches (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), was during the 1830s the most important song teaching aid in schools, churches, and homes. Roverud was sure to publish collections of songs and hymns that could be played on the instrument in a numeric notation, which made note knowledge redundant. From 1835–1837 and 1841–1847 he received funding for training programs for schoolchildren, schoolteachers, church singers and organists. Teaching trips stretching from Kristiansand in the south to Tromsø in the north.

Roverud was no composer, but made arrangements and adapted others' music. As an example, [Henrik Wergeland](#)'s cantata on the occasion of the Gutenberg Jubilee in 1840.

Lars Roverud died 26 February 1850 after being hit by a carriage.



Lars Roverud by [Jacob Munch](#).



ITEMS FOR SALE

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Greetings from Readers

In September, I had a pleasant phone call (8:00 AM our time) from Douglas Plumb of Canton, New York. He comes from a family of musicians and is excited in learning more of the psalmodikon through membership and conversation.

—BH

Jim Kirke of Hancock, Michigan inquired about the psalmodikon, the music and history. Their Finnish Society is interested in adding the psalmodikon to their repertoire of instruments and learning how to make and play it.

After a long absence, Dr. Donald Seymore of Newberry, South Carolina renewed his membership.

Cindy Skoe of Kelliher, Minnesota requested a Songbook because she was getting together in Minnesota to play with her brother in Oregon and Sandy Aune of East Moline, Illinois. — Small world!

Anne-Karin Tveide of Birkeland, Norway sent an order for a Psalmodikon CD as a birthday gift for her husband.

Enclosed is my membership renewal and an extra donation to the psalmodikon organization. I enjoy the Newsletter and thank you for all your hard work. —Nancy Simonson, San Dimas, California

Enclosed is money for the Psalmodikon Songbook. Thanks so much. Now I will have to practice! —Karenalice Jones, Lake Oswego, Oregon

Kirsten Hendrickson, Lake Stevens, Washington is a new member of N/A Psalmodikonforbundet.



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Send orders to: **Floyd Foslien**

567 High Ridge Drive, Hudson, WI 54016

www.fffoslien@sbcglobal.net

Notes from Floyd: These are usually the most difficult components for builders to obtain. I can, however, provide all of the other component parts required to make *psalmodikons*, if the builder is unable to make them or find them locally. You may contact me for prices.

I also sell a complete kit of parts to make a *psalmodikon* for \$130.00. This kit instrument is modelled after an antique Norwegian *salmodikon* (Norwegian spelling) similar to one used by [Lars Roverud](#). He was the "Father" of the Norwegian *salmodikon* and is credited with using transposition sticks to allow playing in various keys without re-tuning so this kit includes a transposition stick. The parts are cut to size and need only to be glued together, sanded, and finished with varnish or lacquer.

Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet & Newsletter

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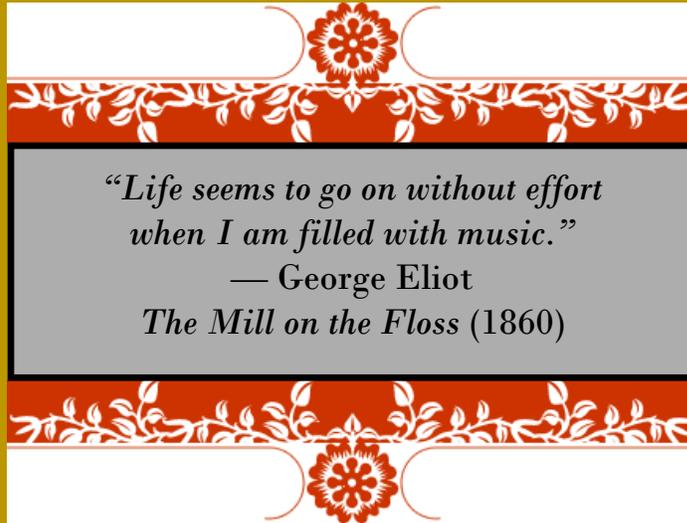
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The *Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet Newsletter* is published in the Spring, Summer, and Autumn. We are always looking for newsworthy items and photos that you want to share with other readers.

The **\$8.00 membership fee** helps to cover the cost of printing and postage for the Newsletter, annual fee for the Psalmodikon Web Site, and annual meeting expenses.

Check the date on your mailing label which indicates if your dues are current.

Send membership dues to: **Beatrice Hole**
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*“Life seems to go on without effort
when I am filled with music.”*

— George Eliot

The Mill on the Floss (1860)

**NORDIC-AMERICAN
PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET**



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